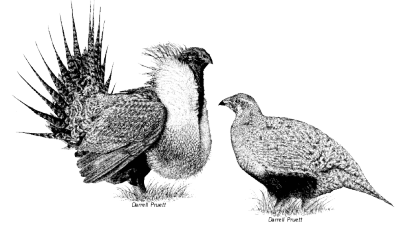


Final Meeting Summary



Date: April 11 and 12, 2008

Meeting: Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee

Location: Dubois Community Center, 301 N. Thomas, Dubois, Idaho

April 11, 2008

In attendance:

Donna Bennett (Owyhee LWG), Lynn Burtenshaw (Upper Snake LWG), Sam Chandler (Big Desert LWG), Jack Depperschmitt (Department of Energy – Idaho), Nate Fisher (Office of Species Conservation), Ron Gill (NRCS), Steve Goddard (Idaho Wildlife Federation, Ada County Fish and Game League), Dan Gossett (Shoshone-Paiute Tribes), Vincent Guyer (Challis LWG), Tom Hemker (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Rich Howard (Idaho Conservation League), Ron Kay (Idaho State Department of Agriculture), Angela Lafferty (Idaho Department of Lands), Paul Makela (BLM Idaho State Office), Rob Mickelsen (U.S. Forest Service), Damien Miller (USFWS), Steve Miller (IASDCD), Ann Moser (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Justin Naderman (East Idaho Uplands LWG), Rochelle Oxarango (Big Desert LWG), John Peavey (North Magic Valley LWG), David Skinner (Sawtooth National Forest, North American Grouse Partnership), and Alison Squier (Ziji Creative Resources Inc.).

Introductions and Review Agenda

Tom Hemker opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Alison Squier asked all the participants to introduce themselves. The group reviewed the draft agenda. Some of the LWG representatives noted that they would not be able to attend the meeting on the 12th and suggested that the agenda be modified to include the LWG updates on the 11th. The group agreed to this change.

Participants reviewed the meeting ground rules and agreed to abide by them.

Miscellaneous SAC Business

Approve Meeting Summary from Previous SAC Meeting

Alison reported that she'd received comments and/or corrections from four people on the January meeting notes. Justin Naderman noted that the new LWGs had not seen the previous SAC meeting notes and asked that they be distributed. Alison noted that at previous meetings they'd talked about posting the notes on the IDFG website. Ann confirmed that it is possible to post the notes. Alison will send copies of all of the 2007 and 2008 final meeting notes to Tom and Ann to post on the IDFG website so that they are available to everyone. The SAC participants agreed to approve the revised, final January SAC meeting notes.

State and Regional Updates

Tom said that he had three major points he wanted to make. First, the state (through IDFG) will need a summary of all conservation actions and other activities that have been accomplished on behalf of sage-grouse in the last five years by June 10th. Ann Moser will be talking more about the details of the USFWS sage-grouse status review and related dates. Second, Tom asked participants to begin thinking about their project proposals for the 2008 funding cycle. He sent the funding solicitation form out to the SAC early this week. Third he wanted to let people know that the Fish and Game Commission will be considering the sage-grouse hunting season at their July and August meetings and that input from the LWGs on this topic was an item of discussion for the second day of the SAC meeting.

Tom explained that in terms of the sage-grouse status review, his current understanding was that the decision regarding listing status would be made in December 2008. In the interim data is being gathered from all of the states involved. He also noted that part of the last status review included consideration of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) conservation assessment. He explained that WAFWA has assigned staff to work on updating parts of that conservation assessment and those updates are due in August. In addition to this effort, a handful of scientists have independently been working on a scientific book on sage-grouse. They are speeding up work on sections of this book in order to provide additional information in support of the status review.

Local Working Group and Other Updates

Following are summaries of information presented by the LWG representatives and others:

- **Nate Fisher** (Office of Species Conservation) – Nate explained that he is the point man for the Governor’s office in regards to sage-grouse issues. He noted that the whole sage-grouse issue is a moving target and is very challenging. The SAC and the LWGs are central to the sage-grouse efforts. He said that the heads of Idaho’s state agencies met on Wednesday with the Governor and that the Governor acknowledged that pulling together the information needed for the status review in June will be a sprint.
 - Tom Hemker noted that he and John Romero were also at this meeting and that John Romero had made a point of highlighting the existence and role of the SAC to the Governor – and that he’d done a very nice job.

- **Ron Gill** (NRCS) – Ron noted that Frank Fink was unable to come to the meeting. In response to a question about NRCS’ response to the status review data call, Ron explained that NRCS has formed an interstate commission that includes a range person, computer experts and others and that they will be working to harvest the relevant data from the NRCS database.

- **Vince Guyer** (Challis LWG) – The Challis LWG hasn’t met since the last SAC meeting. They have a meeting scheduled shortly. Right now they are in the middle of lek counts in the LWG planning area. They are doing some trapping in the Pahsimeroi and in Antelope Flats. They are getting ready to implement the project that they received funding for in 2007.

- **Paul Makela** (BLM) – Paul said that BLM is working on the BLM national sage-grouse data call, which is largely driven by BLM’s Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy reporting requirements. The results from this data call will also be used by BLM to provide information to the USFWS for the sage-grouse status review. As part of the BLM’s data call they are capturing both positive (e.g., conservation actions) and negative (e.g., wildfire acres, new rights of way etc.) influences on sage-grouse. In May-June, a national-level BLM team will roll up the information reported by each state. Paul will also be working with Tom Hemker and Ann Moser to help complete the BLM portion of the USFWS’ sage-grouse data call, pending further internal BLM direction.

In terms of fire rehabilitation efforts there is lots of continuing work on the Murphy Complex Fire and others. In the BLM they were able to provide some funding via the Healthy Lands Initiative to get important work done on other fire rehabilitation projects, since they didn’t receive the needed level of fire rehabilitation funding to cover all projects

Paul has also been working with Joe Hinson and FWS on the West Central CCAA draft to figure out how the CCAA process will mesh with BLM's grazing management etc.

Paul is also working with TNC on the Landscape Toolbox Project. This project consists of development of various spatial analysis tools for landscape and project planning. They are currently testing areas in Laidlaw Park (North Magic SGPA) and the 45 Ranch (Owyhee SGPA). The Landscape Toolbox will use user-friendly web based mapping tools. It will probably be available sometime next year.

In addition, Paul reported progress is being made on development of a sage-grouse habitat photo guide for landowners. Partners include Idaho BLM, FWS, IDFG, OSC and Univ. Idaho. The Univ. Idaho is currently in the process of identifying a graduate student to work on this project. The SAC will be asked to help review a draft, once it is available.. Input will also be sought from selected LWG representatives. It's a two-year project so a product for review should be ready around 2009 or 2010.

In another research proposal, BLM will be cooperating with Jack Connelly (IDFG) and Kerry Reese (Univ. Idaho) will to quantify and evaluate the effects of tall structures (power lines, cell towers etc.) and fences on sage-grouse. This effort might also include research on collision deterrent effectiveness. This will also be a two-year project.

The BLM has been actively involved in reviewing the energy corridor proposals that are coming forward including the west wide energy corridor and Gateway West. With respect to the west wide corridor, the EIS team asked for additional comments as to the importance to sage-grouse of the Big Desert and Medicine Lodge areas. The BLM State Office and Idaho Falls District compiled regional, statewide and local information/data and made recommendations that the sections of the proposed west wide energy corridor that are routed through these two areas be deleted. (Note: Jack Depperschmidt from DOE said that they had made a similar recommendation and suggested routing the power lines down the Interstate 15 corridor; USFWS has also signed a joint letter with IDFG on the topic.)

On the Gateway West powerline project, that passes through southern Idaho, the BLM has just established a Level 1 team, to facilitate Section 7 ESA consultation. Sage-grouse will also be addressed, in addition to other species of concern. **Damien Miller** (USFWS) – Damien said that USFWS is also part of the Level 1 team that provides comments on powerlines etc. He hasn't personally been directly involved. Damien explained that he was sitting in for Kendra Womack who wasn't able to attend the meeting.

- **Damien Miller** (USFWS) – Damien said that USFWS is also part of the Level 1 team that provides comments on power lines etc. He hasn't personally been directly involved. Damien explained that he was sitting in for Kendra Womack who wasn't able to attend the meeting.
- **David Skinner** (USFS, North American Grouse Partnership) – David said that he is a member of the North Magic Valley LWG but is not their representative so he would defer to John Peavey in providing an update on the group. He noted that he is the current Idaho Chapter Chairman of the North American Grouse Partnership. He said that they have historically been a loosely coordinated group but that he is hoping that the group will become more engaged.
- **Justin Naderman** (East Idaho Uplands LWG) – Justin explained that their LWG spent the first few months in an educational mode learning about sage-grouse populations and habitats. Then last fall they identified various issues that they wanted to address in their plan. They identified issues by risk. Approximately 12-15 people meet each month. The group seems to be getting along well. They meet at two separate locations since the group is very spread out and couldn't agree on one site that worked for everyone. They meet by conference call and alternate which site the facilitator attends in person and then an IDFG staffer helps with the other site. They've been going through the state plan and trying to adapt that information to local conditions. One of the big concerns they've identified in their group is the lack of information about their populations. For instance, they don't know if they have isolated populations, if the populations are migratory, etc. One of the things they've addressed in their plan is the lack of data. The Army Corps of Engineers put in funding of a helicopter survey to identify potential lek areas. They have used half of that funding. They've identified a five-year plan to continue to search for leks.
- **Sam Chandler and Rochelle Oxarango** (Big Desert LWG) – Their group started about a year ago. They reviewed the status and history in their planning area. They've started on their plan and are about one half way through. Approximately 10 to 18 people show up for the meetings. They evaluated different risk factors and are now tweaking the state plan. They have addressed 14 of 22 risk factors. In the Big Dessert most of the land is BLM land. Their current assignment is to come up with projects to submit for the 2008 funding cycle.
- **Ron Kay** (ISDA) – Ron stated that ISDA is trying to attend as many of the LWG meetings as possible.

- **Lynn Burtenshaw** – (Upper Snake LWG) – They haven't met as a group since the last SAC meeting. The Executive Committee has been meeting. But the group lost a key member, Kent Christopher, to a skiing accident, which has been really difficult. Lynn talked about how Kent had made a real difference in helping him see things through a different light. He talked about how when he started with the LWG he felt like it was the ranchers who were the endangered species and over time Ken showed him how they had some common ground. Lynn also noted that it took the Upper Snake LWG seven years to develop their plan and that the group started with 130 people and is now down to 7-8 people. He noted that having the state plan with the outline and tools provided for guidance will be a bit help to new groups. The Executive Committee is now working on reviewing their plan in the context of the guidelines and information provided in the state plan.

- **Jack Depperschmidt** (DOE) – Jack Depperschmidt (DOE) – Jack said that DOE headquarters is looking at a Global Nuclear Energy Partnership. Half of that effort is a high level global initiative, while the other half is Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee Draft Meeting Notes April 2008 Page 6 looking at an Advanced Fuel Cycles Facility that would have a footprint of about 350 acres. They are currently analyzing the impacts of locating the facility at various locations within the DOE complex . There should be more information available in the next month to six months.

At the last SAC meeting he talked about wind power generations. DOE is going to start looking at potential feasibility of various sites on the INL for wind generation. This initiative is based on the 2005 Energy Policy Act and a directive from the Whitehouse. Federal agencies are being encouraged to develop renewable energy resources on their own sites and receive bonus points if they are able to do so.

After the last SAC meeting Betsy Holmes secured additional funding for 50 sagegrouse transmitters. Right now they have about 10 on the ground. They will share the data with IDFG and others as soon as possible. They will be radio tracking birds to the very top end of their site.

- **Steve Goddard** (Idaho Wildlife Federation, Ada County Fish and Game League) – They are planning on going ahead with habitat improvements on the Dry Creek exclosure with BLM. Also they are working on a project with high school students in a number of schools in Boise where the students will get credit for working on projects. Their group is also working on putting together some research projects.

- **Rich Howard** (Idaho Conservation League) – Rich said he'd like to put in a pitch to any LWGs that hadn't been involved in collecting sagebrush seed this past winter to consider doing so. He said that he'd spend a large number of hours doing so and had really enjoyed the experience. The ICL conference at Red Fish Lake is coming up in May. This year they will have a panel discussion on sage-grouse.
- **Dan Gossett** (Shoshone-Paiute Tribes) – Dan said that like in other places around the state, it had been a very wet winter and was hard to get to the leks on the ground. They will have a helicopter out next week and should know more about their populations after that. The Tribe did approve the transfer of 10 birds to the Yakima Tribe. They will plan on giving the Yakima 10 birds a year for some period into the future. Dan commented that their "birds without borders" program was apparently still underway since a couple of their radio collared birds showed up about 60 miles north of where they were last year. They are still missing a number of birds. He also noted that the Tribe received a USFWS Tribal grant to continue West Nile Virus (WNV) monitoring.

Dan said the power line from CJ Strike is progressing rapidly and that they are doing a really great job of tearing up the ground and spreading cheat grass. He anticipates that will be reaching the reservation lands with important nesting habitat for a variety of bird species right during prime nesting season. They'll try to get them to put the line in after nesting season is done. The Tribe should have a new Wildlife and Parks Director soon.

- **Rob Mickelsen** (USFS) – Rob will be working with Paul, Ann and others to coordinate on the data call. A decision about whether they will scale up the information at the USFS has not been made yet. The NEPA for the forage kochia project is done. Since the last SAC meeting they've visited with folks who had concerns about the project and satisfactorily addressed those concerns. The Curlew restoration project is moving forward. The USFS proposed a controlled burn for Berry Creek that is currently in litigation and will not be going forward this spring. Lek counts in the Curlew haven't started yet because of snow.
- **Donna Bennett** (Owyhee LWG) – Their LWG decided to change their meeting place to meet at the new museum in Murphy because they were seeing declining participation at the meetings. They discussed the mastication project at their recent meeting. They got snowed out on implementing the project this spring but should be able to implement it this summer. A number of landowners are very excited about the project. The LWG will be going on field trips to visit past project sites in response to the data call. They'll be bringing a group of scientists along on the field trips in order to evaluate the success of those past projects.

They had Brett Dumas with Idaho Power come and give a presentation on the energy corridor that is proposed to go through Owyhee County. The nuclear plant that was proposed in Owyhee County was cancelled and they are now talking about a site across the river in Elmore County. There is a very big wind power project being built on private ground near Bennett. Idaho is building a substation out to it.

Mark Brackett recently came and gave the LWG an update and presentation on the ICA Scorecard.

- **John Peavey** (North Magic Valley LWG) – The North Magic Valley LWG has been having great attendance. Spent lots of time talking about leks, energy corridor, roads, railroads and the new airport. The group has also spent a lot of time working on letters about airports, power lines, etc.

John also mentioned that he's talked to IDFG before about his concerns over predation by ravens. He asked Tom Hemker what it would take to be able to shoot ravens. Tom responded that it would probably take an international treaty. John also expressed concern over management of grazing lands and missed opportunities to use livestock as a management tools to provide benefits to sage-grouse habitat.

- **Ann Lafferty** (IDL) – Idaho Department of Lands has also been coordinating with Ann Moser and others on the data call. They are looking at projects that IDL has done. They are also looking at projects completed by lessees. They need to relay back to private landowners the need for information about projects that weren't done on state lands or on lands that aren't part of the LWG planning areas.

2007 Local Working Group Annual Report

Ann Moser distributed copies of the 2007 LWG Annual Report. She explained that the information was collected from all of the LWGs and then compiled and summarized in the annual report. Many people complimented Ann for the great job on the annual report noting that this was the first time all the information from the LWGs had been compiled in one report.

Ann stated that she hoped to build on the report in future years and that the process of responding to the data call would probably provide some additional details that would contribute to a better report in the future. The 2007 LWG Annual Report will be posted on the IDFG web site.

USFWS Sage-grouse Status Review

Kendra Womack was on vacation and could not make it to the SAC meeting. She worked with Ann Moser before she left to put together a PowerPoint presentation for the SAC meeting. Ann gave the presentation and Ann, Tom Hemker, Damien Miller and Nate Fisher attempted to answer questions about the status review. The PowerPoint presentation is included with these notes in Attachment A.

Conservation Activities and Data Collection Update

Status of Five-Year Data Collection Form

Ann Moser explained that development of the data collection form has been delayed because they've been waiting for the USFWS to finish their database. IDFG received the format for the database the previous day.

Ann said that an Idaho Inter-Agency Team (IA Team) had been developed to coordinate the collection of information for the USFWS status review. The IA Team core members include IDFG, BLM, USFS, NRCS and IDL. The IA Team is responsible for gathering information on sage-grouse conservation efforts and entering those into a USFWS database.

For the purposes of this data collection exercise, a conservation effort is defined as a specific action that will directly or indirectly benefit sage-grouse or sage-grouse habitat. The IA Team will attempt to document efforts back 5 years starting in 2003.

The IA Team will report information on cooperative projects on any land ownership and projects on private or state land. Federal agencies are responsible to report federal-funding projects on federal lands. The IA Team will report on cooperative projects on BLM and USFS lands (i.e., multiple partners and funding sources).

The IA Team will distribute to different forms to document:

- Completed projects
- Uncompleted projects

These forms will be distributed to all state agencies, local working groups, and interested NGOs. To be included in the USDWS conservation effort database, a project must:

- Be able to answer all the appropriate questions on the form. The USFWS is asking very specific questions that must be answered.
- Have project documentation (e.g., formal project agreement or final report).
- Projects that do not meet these 2 criteria should be submitted through the public input process.

For inclusion all input must be provided by June 10, 2008 to Ann Moser by e-mail at (amoser@idfg.idaho.gov) or mail at IDFG, P.O. Box 25, Boise ID 83707. If you have questions contact Ann Moser at 208-287-2705.

Landowner Scorecard

John Romero had planned on presenting information on the Idaho Cattle Associations efforts to develop a landowner scorecard. John was unable to attend the meeting so Tom Hemker provided an overview of the scorecard concept.

The sage-grouse "Score Card" card would be used on private lands to develop a statewide sage-grouse CCAA for private and state lands, provide information about sage-grouse habitat on private and state lands, and provide landowners incentives to improve sage-grouse habitat on private and state lands. The "Score Card" is a simple process, inexpensive to administer, and is being well received by landowners. The "score card" will not meet PECE, as PECE is currently interpreted.

Conservation Actions on Private Lands

Steve Miller the President of the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts gave an overview of the Soil Conservation District structure and representation. He noted that in Idaho there are approximately 4,600 farms and ranches that would potentially be impacted by a sage-grouse listing.

He presented the group with the idea of using the already existing Best Management Practices (BMPs) as a tool to identify conservation actions that are providing benefit to sage-grouse and their habitats. He also talked about the work that has already been accomplished under TMDLs the likelihood that many of these activities are also beneficial to sage-grouse and their habitats.

He suggested to the group the value of coordinating all of the information about habitat activities, on the ground projects, conservation actions, and etc. under one roof. Specifically he talked about the importance of being able to coordinate data across state agencies. He recommended consideration of the Idaho OnePlan to address this need.

Idaho OnePlan provides data and software to help growers develop a single conservation farm plan that can be pre-endorsed by the various agencies, streamlining and simplifying the regulatory process that farmers face.

Idaho OnePlan currently is a multi-agency project to combine government regulations and current best management practices for agriculture into a single plan, integrating federal, state, and local regulations for:

- Nutrient, Pest and Waste Management
- Water Quality and Wetlands
- Air Quality
- Financial Assistance
- Endangered Species
- Petroleum Storage Tanks

The idea is that farmers, ranchers and agencies can benefit from reducing duplication of effort, regulatory red tape and cross-agency bottlenecks. The OnePlan coordinates the various conservation requirements of the numerous agencies with regulatory and technical oversight. The site includes aerial photos, soil data, hydrology maps, roads, and borders on different GIS map layers are available. With this data and the OnePlan software questionnaire, growers can generate a report and plan of action—a conservation farm plan—with effective area-specific best management practices (BMPs).

In closing Steve asked the SAC to support coordination efforts of the Soil Conservation Districts.

Funding Subcommittee Update

Tom Hemker reported that he and John Romero had visited with the Congressional delegation and asked for four million in funding for sage-grouse conservation. The Congressional delegation had responded that one million was more realistic given previous funding levels. But they were appreciative of the serious nature of the sage-grouse issues. The maximum funding historically has been \$400,000.

In addition, Joe Hinson gave a presentation in Washington D.C., and Jeff Allen with Office of Species Conservation was also in Washington D.C. recently. Securing the necessary funding will be a challenge but the timing is right.

Rich Howard also noted that Idaho Conservation League had written a letter in support of the funding request.

There was no update on the possible MOU or other agreement regarding OSC funding disbursement.

2008 and 2009 Sage-grouse Funding

Alison Squier reviewed the history of the revised funding process, timeline and application form. She explained that the SAC had dedicated quite a bit of time to reviewing and revising the schedule, the application form and the review criteria. A key objective was to provide for a regular and predictable funding cycle.

Ann Moser and Tom Hemker noted that the funding solicitation form had been distributed. Tom asked the group if they thought the deadline for returning the project applications should be extended since the solicitation was distributed late. None of the SAC members wished to extend the deadline beyond the July 1 date.

The funding review subcommittee, which includes representatives from all the LWGs will convene the day before the July SAC meeting to review the proposals and develop a recommendation to the full SAC, and then the full SAC will develop recommendations to forward to the Directors of IDFG and Office of Species Conservation for their consideration.

The SAC TAT has not had time to work on the 2009 project proposal guidelines so this item will be forwarded to a future agenda.

Discussion Item: SAC Executive Committee

Meeting participants had a discussion about the possibility of setting up a SAC executive committee. This was an issue that John Romero had suggested at the January SAC meeting for future discussion.

Some of the LWGs (e.g., the Upper Snake) had experience with having an executive committee. Representatives from the Upper Snake described how their executive committee had a rotating chair and rotating membership. They explained that the group has been helpful in being able to meet when a quick decision is needed on an issue. Right now the Upper Snake LWG executive committee is working on revision of LWG plan to align it better with new guidance in state plan.

In the SAC discussion about the pros and cons and relative need for a SAC executive committee the following points were raised:

- Having an executive committee would allow for more timely response to key issues and/or decisions. It takes awhile to set up meeting with the entire SAC.
- Its not clear that there is really a need for the SAC to have an executive committee since in the past there haven't really been that many decisions that the SAC has had to make – or a need to make them in an accelerated time frame.
- One potential need for an executive committee is to have individuals who could participate in other meetings and coordination efforts.
- A challenge to setting up an executive committee is that historically there has been a reluctance to delegate authority among SAC members.
- In past the SAC has been able to make decisions (e.g., the buried power line issue) by email with a very quick turn around when it was necessary to do so.

- Who would be on a SAC executive committee, how would that be decided, and how long would they serve?
- One alternate approach might be to identify a “process agreement” that describes and defines how a decision would be made in the absence of a full SAC meeting.
- There might be a role for an executive committee to play in coordinating an update of Chapter 6 in the state plan, although the SAC might also simply choose to delegate the work to the SAC Technical Advisory Team (TAT) or to a writing subcommittee as they had done with the state plan.

The group agreed to table the issue for further discussion at a later time. In general, the participants did not see a need to establish an executive committee in the immediate term.

Discussion Item: Update of Chapter 6 (Implementation Plan) in State Plan

The group turned next to a discussion of Chapter 6 in the state plan, which is the implementation plan for the state plan. When the state plan was completed in 2006, participants agreed that the implementation chapter would be updated and fleshed out a little more at some point in the future.

In discussion, meeting participants identified some potential approaches to updating and/or revising Chapter 6 those included:

- Have the SAC TAT provide a status update on what’s been done relative to dates and actions listed in chapter 6.
- One participant suggested that this status update might be submitted to the USFWS as part of status review data collection effort.
- Other participants thought it made more sense to wait until the USFWS decision in December before attempting to do any update of Chapter 6.
- Another suggestion was to review all the research needs identified in Chapter 4 under each threat and include those in an updated Chapter 6 (as appropriate) as implementation items.

After some discussion a consensus began to emerge around the following approach (the group agreed to revisit this concept on April 12th to see if there was agreement on this approach):

1. In the summer of 2008 (after the state and federal data call is complete) complete a review of the progress to date in completing actions identified in Chapter 6. The SAC TAT would be responsible for doing this.
2. After item 1 above is complete, identify research needs from Chapter 4 that should be included as actions in Chapter 6. The SAC TAT would be responsible for doing this.

3. After the December 2008 listing decision by USFWS is made, review and revise Chapter 6 (including the completed items 1 and 2 above) in the context of new data and information provided as a result of the status review. The group did not identify anyone responsible for this action during the discussion.

Participants agreed to return to this item to check for consensus on April 12.

Note: On April 12th the SAC agreed by consensus to items 1, 2, and 3 above.

SAC Letter in Response to USFWS Status Review

As a result of the discussion about the USFWS status review and the revision of Chapter 6, one of the SAC members suggested the idea of having the SAC submit comments as part of the public comments period. The idea would be to capture things that might not be captured as part of the formal data call e.g., development of new LWGs, etc.

After some additional discussion SAC members identified the following list of items to be included in a letter to the USFWS:

- Identify number of SAC participants and range of interests represented
- Identify collective commitment of the group and resources (i.e., days in meetings, hours, travel miles and time, etc.) by SAC members
- Show same as above for LWGs
- Note effort involved in completion of state plan – and note that state plan was completed
- Identify new local working groups that have been established
- Identify LWG plans that have been completed
- Identify what's been accomplished from Chapter 6 (to extent possible)
- Capture new research that's been initiated
- Identify new information that has been acquired (e.g., new leks counted)
- Provide a summary of Table 11 from the 2007 LWG annual report (e.g., total number of projects implemented)
- Note that the sage-grouse hunting season was closed in some areas due to WNV in 2006 and due to fire in 2007
- Note that in 2000 the IDFG initiated new regulations on licenses to get more data in order to better manage sage-grouse
- Note mail in survey added also so get more data to better manage sage-grouse (year implemented)

The group also agreed by consensus that:

1. The letter would be drafted by June 1 and sent out to the SAC for review and comments.

2. SAC members agreed to submit comments by June 10.
3. The following individuals offered to help Tom Hemker draft the letter: Paul Makela, Rich Howard, Steve Goddard and Alison Squier.
4. A final letter will be submitted to USFWS by June 22 or 27 (depending on the date ultimately identified by USFWS).

Participants also spent some time discussing who should sign the letter. They agreed that it should include signatures from all the SAC members (either with a real signature or just listing their names and affiliations. It was also suggested that the letter might include the signatures of current and past SAC members (e.g., Jim Hagenbarth).

Nate Fisher volunteered that OSC would coordinate with other states to suggest they do something similar.

Adjourn for Day

Tom thanked everyone for their effort and the group adjourned for the day.

April 12, 2008

In attendance:

Donna Bennett (Owyhee LWG), Lynn Burtenshaw (Upper Snake LWG), Sam Chandler (Big Desert LWG), Jack Depperschmitt (Department of Energy – Idaho), Nate Fisher (Office of Species Conservation), Steve Goddard (Idaho Wildlife Federation, Ada County Fish and Game League), Dan Gossett (Shoshone-Paiute Tribes), Vincent Guyer (Challis LWG), Tom Hemker (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Rich Howard (Idaho Conservation League), Paul Makela (BLM Idaho State Office), Rob Mickelsen (U.S. Forest Service), Damien Miller (USFWS), Ann Moser (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Rochelle Oxarango (Big Desert LWG), Alan Sands (TNC, IDFG), David Skinner (Sawtooth National Forest, North American Grouse Partnership), and Alison Squier (Ziji Creative Resources Inc.).

Status Update: West Central CCAA

Tom Hemker gave an update presentation on the West Central LWG's CCAA efforts on behalf of Joe Hinson who was not able to attend the meeting. Tom used Joe Hinson's PowerPoint presentation as a guide. The PowerPoint is attached to these notes as Attachment B.

2008 Sage-grouse Hunting Season Setting

Tom Hemker talked about the IDFG process for setting sage-grouse seasons in 2008. In summary the process will be as follows:

- June 1 through July 15
 - Tom H. will coordinate with IDFG local staff on the hunting issue. The local staff will review their most current population data and other relevant information.
 - The local IDFG staff will talk with the LWGs that they participate in and present any new information about sage-grouse population status locally and then seek LWG input regarding the hunting seasons in their LWG regions.
 - The LWG will be asked to make recommendations to their local IDFG representatives
 - IDFG local staff will share those recommendations with Tom H.
- July 24 – Tom H. will provide a recommendation to the Idaho Fish and Game Commission
- August – The Idaho Fish and Game Commission makes decision on seasons
- *Note: IDFG Director can close season (emergency closure) with 24 hours notice in case of emergency (e.g., fire, WNV)*

Discussion: LWG Boundary Changes/Updates

The next meeting agenda item was a discussion about how LWG boundaries might be changed or updated. Alison and Paul Makela reviewed the context for the agenda item. Alison explained that she'd contacted IDFG and BLM about how to update the sage-grouse habitat map to reflect the changed LWG boundary that participants in the North Magic Valley had agreed to. Paul explained that this had initiated consideration of the potential need to update other LWG planning areas and possibly to consider a broader scale update.

The item was added to the SAC agenda in order to initiate a dialog with LWG about their thoughts on the question. Following is a summary of topics of discussion:

- Tom Hemker explained that the initial LWG boundaries came from 1997 sage-grouse management plan. These were subsequently revised to incorporate key habitat types when those were developed.
- Paul Makela pointed out that in the initial development of the planning areas an effort was also made to avoid straddling BLM management jurisdictions.
- Participants noted that many of the LWGs had made some adjustments to their planning boundaries over time and that these were not identified in the state plan or in the current maps.

- Jarbidge, East Idaho Uplands, Upper Snake, West Central, East and West Magic Valley (now North Magic Valley) have all made some changes to their boundaries – those changes are not currently reflected in the state plan.
- Some participants suggested that LWG alterations to their borders might occur in order to incorporate a broader range of habitat types or presence of birds.
- It was suggested that one potential approach to updating LWG boundaries might be to create new planning areas that would provide seamless coverage across state habitat.
- This suggestion (above) prompted a discussion about what would happen if you expanded boundaries in terms of new landowners who weren't involved in the development of the LWG plans. There was concern among a number of participants that landowners who weren't originally part of the planning area and who thus were not involved in development of the LWG plan might be "forced" to comply with management plans they hadn't participated in developing.
- It was noted that USFWS would focus on grouse and grouse habitat – not specifically on LWG planning area boundaries.
- One suggestion was that it might be possible to separate the political boundary of a LWG from the grouse habitat boundary.
- Changing boundaries across the board would mean updating all of the charts, maps, etc. in the state plan.
- One option that many participants favored is that LWGs define boundaries in their completed plans. When LWGs update their plans they can choose to update their boundaries or not.
- Participants discussed the possibility that over time areas that aren't considered sage-grouse habitat now could become so in the future (e.g., wind energy mitigation might create new suitable habitat where there is none now).
- Some participants noted that it would be very important to talk with private landowners who might be included in revised boundaries first (i.e., before changing the boundaries).
- Vince Guyer noted that in the Challis plan the description of the LWG area includes habitat that is not included on maps.
- Vince also noted that the Upper Big Lost is discussed in both the Challis and Upper Snake plan but that this is not reflected in the state plan.
- One possible approach would be to consider updating the LWG boundaries in next update of state plan (about 5 years +/-).

Participants agreed to raise the question with their LWGs in future conversations. The group agreed that it is not an urgent issue at this time but that it is important to involve the LWGs and seek their input and preferences early in the process. Since a number of LWGs have made

changes to their original boundaries, and since there are a number of new LWGs it will be necessary at some point to update the existing maps and information in the state plan.

Surprise Presentation: Mike Gregg on Sage-grouse Reproductive Ecology: Linkages Among Habitat Resources, Maternal Nutrition, and Chick Survival

As an unexpected meeting bonus, Rich Howard and Damien Miller had invited Mike Gregg with USFWS to come and give a presentation on his research on sage-grouse reproductive ecology and linkages among habitat resources, maternal nutrition, and chick survival. Mike gave a fascinating presentation, which is attached in Attachment C.

If you have questions, you can contact Mike at 509-942-8185, or mike_gregg@fws.gov. His research work can also be downloaded at <https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu>.

Discussion: Mitigation/Conservation Crediting

The final agenda item was a discussion about mitigation and conservation crediting issues. The agenda topic was suggested by Lynn Burtenshaw; Lynn asked if there was any standard approach, who received funds, how they were distributed, etc. Following is a summary of some of the general points that were raised in the SAC discussion on this topic:

- There is a need to have a broader discussion about how mitigation is implemented and funded.
- At present there is no standardized approach to mitigation and conservation efforts, and mitigation credits are negotiated on an individual basis.
- It was suggested that there might be value in identifying a standard approach.
- If you destroy a large area of habitat how do you recreate it? Some participants objected to the idea of mitigation. Others asked how can you assign value?
- Another consideration is the permanence of the habitat destruction.
- Consider assigning value based on lek buffer zones (e.g., per mile in linear cases).
- Paul Makela noted that in discussion about the habitat suitability model – one of the questions they struggled with was which buffer do you use (i.e., power line buffers, road buffers of different widths)?
- A number of participants talked about the fact that “just say no” doesn’t work as an approach. Even though you want to protect all of the habitat there has to be some middle ground because the energy needs in particular are hard to stop. The issue of Idaho narrowly avoiding rolling brownouts was raised.
- One individual suggested looking at the carbon crediting model as a possible approach.

- A number of participants agreed that there could be value in the SAC developing a consensus on a crediting/mitigation approach.
- Many participants agreed that preventing and minimizing the potential damage to habitat should be the first priority, then what you can't prevent or minimize should be offset through mitigation.
- In key habitat alternate approaches, or rerouting of power lines should be a priority.
- The group talked for some time about conversion of AC to DC current. One participant explained that most power is carried in AC lines in the US but that DC current can be buried. It is expensive to bury but once you've made the conversion to DC the efficiency is increased substantially.
- Nate Fisher noted that Director of the Governor's Office of Environmental Resources, Paul Kjellander had worked to try to coordinate a policy on this question and had found it extremely intractable. Nate suggested that Paul Kjellander might be a good person to invite to give a presentation at July SAC meeting about their Office's efforts.
- Paul Makela pointed out that it is important to remember that federal mitigation sideboards already exist and that those need to be taken into account.
- The Conservation Sagebrush Initiative (CSI) was also mentioned as an example of an ongoing effort to develop an approach to mitigation.

Meeting participants agreed to establish a mitigation/conservation crediting subcommittee to investigate the issue and potentially bring forward some recommendations. Dan Gosset, Paul Makela, and Lynn Burtenshaw volunteered to be on the subcommittee. It was suggested that Brett Dumas should be invited to participate also. The subcommittee will initiate research on mitigation/conservation efforts available information, etc. and present their findings to the SAC at the July meeting.

Next Steps and Assignments

SAC members agreed to the following next steps and assignments:

- Ann Moser will distribute the five-year data collection request in the next few weeks to the LWGs.
- Alison will send copies of all of the 2007 and 2008 final SAC meeting notes to Tom and Ann to post on the IDFG website so that they are available to everyone by mid May 2008.
- Tom Hemker, Paul Makela, Rich Howard, Steve Goddard and Alison Squier will coordinate to write a letter on behalf of the SAC to USFWS per discussion above in notes. Tom Hemker will distribute the draft letter to the SAC for their review by June 1.

- SAC members will review and comment on the letter referenced above to USFWS by June 10. A final letter will be submitted to USFWS by June 22 or 27 (depends on the date identified by USFWS).
- The mitigation/conservation crediting subcommittee will provide an update to the SAC at the July meeting on their initial investigation into approaches to mitigation and conservation.

July 15 & 16 SAC draft meeting agenda items:

- Funding proposal review (funding subcommittee – includes one representative from all LWG - to meet on afternoon July 14).
- Presentation from Paul Kjellander on efforts to look at mitigation/conservation crediting questions (suggested by Nate Fisher).
- Report from mitigation/conservation crediting subcommittee.
- Hunting season discussion.
- Presentation on solicitors opinion on “significant portion of the range” Tom Perry with OSC.

Adjourn

Tom Hemker thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting.